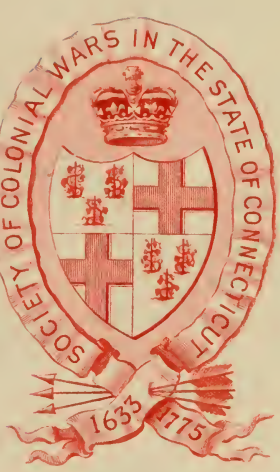

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THE CAPTURE OF LOUISBOURG.

By Rev. George Leon Walker, D.D.

ADDRESS DELIVERED MAY 1, 1895.

JUST a hundred and fifty years ago, to-day, in the fading light of that afternoon of May 1st, the last boat-load of a squadron of thirty-two hundred and fifty men—some of them lineal ancestors of quite a number of us sitting here in this comfortable room—scrambled ashore over the stones and seaweed of Fresh-Water Cove, in Chapeau Rouge Bay, about four miles from the fortress of Louisbourg.

(I cannot, of course, permit myself to doubt that every member of the Society of Colonial Wars could stand a first-class civil service examination on every possible fact of Colonial history and geography. Nevertheless, in order to relieve the dangerous pressure of so much knowledge in all our memories, I have thought it just as well to draw a rough outline of the region we are speaking of.) They

They had begun the debarkation in the afternoon of the day before, April 30, under some small fire from a scouting party from the fort, having a couple of their number wounded, but on the other hand killing six of their assailants and capturing as many more. To-day they completed their transference to the inhospitable shore, encountering no further difficulty for the moment, than the plunge through the tumultuous surf which wet them to the skin, and the scrabble for footing on the slippery shingle of the beach. Behind them, at anchor in the bay, was a motley fleet of sloops and transfers, eighty or ninety in number, containing the provisions of the expedition, 500 barrels of powder, and the twenty cannon and three mortars which had, by the wild genius who planned the expedition, been deemed sufficient for the undertaking. One hundred men and eight small cannon had been left behind a few days before at Canso, fifty miles away, where the miscellaneous fleet had rendezvoused; and four hundred men with a small armament had been sent to capture St. Peters, a settlement intermediate between Canso and Louisbourg.

But here was the great bulk of the expedition, more or less safe and sound, on the stony and boggy island of Cape Breton, almost within gun range

range of the most formidable fortress ever built on the American continent, as sunset fell down on them that first day of May, 1745, a hundred and fifty years ago.

How came they there, and how did they get on once being arrived?

As to what brought them to the spot—this was, perhaps, as conspicuous an instance as the turmoils of mankind anywhere afford of the disastrous results of what we frequently hear of, "a woman in the case." For fifteen years following 1725, a reasonable degree of peace had prevailed along the American frontiers. Pioneer settlements on the Massachusetts and New Hampshire borders and out along the New York lakes and rivers thrived and multiplied. The shipping merchants of the coasts sent out their vessels to Europe or the West Indies with a tolerable degree of hopefulness and mothers in the new inland settlements laid down at night with a reasonable measure of confidence that they and their babes would not be scalped before morning.

But alas! on the 20th of October, 1740, died Charles VI., the emperor of Germany. But what was there about the death of this estimable Austrian gentleman, at 55 years of age, of a gall-stone in his liver, at a remote European town, to affect the course of New England story? Why,

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Why, everything to affect it. The canny old fellow left a daughter—Maria Theresa by name—a very presentable young woman by all accounts, but whose right of succession to the Austrian throne under former usages of that Hapsburg family were rather dubious; succession being generally limited to the male line. Considering which fact the emperor, her father, while in the full vigor of his swashbucklering health had secured the pledge of most of the crowned heads of Europe, including George Second of England, but not including, of course, the king of France, that they would stand by the girl and see her safely through. But no sooner was the father dead than several of the parties to what was called the "Pragmatic Sanction" forgot their agreement. Frederick of Prussia proceeded to slice off a province of Austria and annex it to his own territory. Spain repudiated the Pragmatic agreement in favor of her sovereign. George Second stood by his pledges and made the woman's cause his own, first against Spain, and later against France. France, always the foe of England and often of Austria, declared war upon both; and the quarrel of the Hapsburg woman on the Danube became by 1744 the fight of Frenchman and Englishman along every water-course and coast line of Canada and North America.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts had at this juncture an enthusiastic, wide-awake lawyer for governor, William Shirley by name; a man of very many creditable abilities and virtues; but exceedingly ambitious and possessed with the idea that he was a great military strategist as well. Stirred up by a sanguine frontiersman from Damariscotta, Me., one William Vaughn by name (and by the way, what terrible fire-eating fellows these Maine statesmen are, both in ancient and modern times) who told the governor that the snow often fell so deep about the Louisbourg fortifications that men could walk straight across the walls into the town. Governor Shirley conceived the idea of taking Louisbourg by surprise. Winter was well along. The great military stronghold of North America, which had been twenty-five years in building; which had been laid out on the plans of Vauban; which had cost thirty million livres, equal, perhaps, to as many dollars now; which was garrisoned by about seventeen hundred regular troops; whose walls were supplied with ninety heavy cannon and with many swivels and mortars; whose defences were supported by two outlying battery forts, mounting each thirty heavy guns, was to be captured, so Vaughn and Shirley planned, while the garrison was asleep. Shirley communicated his plan to the General

General Court of Massachusetts on January 9, 1745, first exacting an oath of secrecy about the communication he was about to make. The General Court sat down on the scheme. But Shirley persisted. He got up petitions for a reversal of the unfavorable decision. He did get it reversed by a single vote, a vote which would have been neutralized, however, if a certain deputy had not broken his leg in hastening to the House to record his dissent. But once having secured his majority for the enterprise Shirley kept his couriers flying on his errands of incitement and solicitation. New York and Pennsylvania declined co-operation. None of the colonies south of Connecticut showed interest in the scheme, save that Governor Clinton lent ten eighteen-pounders after it became clear that Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire were bound to go ahead.

Massachusetts did nobly, raising and equipping 3,300 men. New Hampshire raised four hundred and fifty-four, of whom, however, a hundred and fifty were to be paid by Massachusetts. Connecticut contributed five hundred and sixteen to the enterprise. As the preparations went forward enthusiasm grew. Something of religious zeal mingled with patriotic loyalty. Were not the Louisbourgites Roman Catholics as well as Frenchmen?

men? Parson Moody of York, Maine, who went chaplain to the Massachusetts contingent, carried his private axe with him to hew down the images in the papistic church at Louisbourg. William Pepperell, a generous-hearted merchant of Kittery, who had been selected by Governor Shirley as commander-in-chief of the enterprise, solicited the advice and co-operation of the celebrated evangelist George Whitefield, then on his second visit to New England, and who had been offered a chaplaincy to the troops. Whitefield declined the chaplaincy; rather discouraged Pepperell about the undertaking; but, being entreated, gave a motto for the flag, "Nil desperandum Christo duce," suggesting at once a certain religious quality and the quixotic character of the crusade.

Here in Connecticut a special session of the assembly was held from the 26th to the 29th of February, at which it was voted to co-operate with the Shirley enterprise. In pursuance of this resolve, Lieutenant-Governor Roger Wolcott of Windsor was appointed major-general, second in command under Pepperell, and received Governor Shirley's commission, as well as Governor Law's. Andrew Burr of Fairfield was designated as colonel; Simon Lothrop of Norwich lieutenant-colonel; Israel Newton of Colchester as major. Captains' commissions

missions were issued to Elaezer Goodrich of Wethersfield, David Wooster of New Haven, Stephen Lee of New London, Daniel Chapman of Ridgefield, William Whiting of Norwich, Robert Denison of Stonington, Andrew Ward of Guilford and James Church of Hartford. The Rev. Elisha Williams of Wethersfield, retired from the rectorship of Yale College, was designated as chaplain to the Connecticut troops, and Dr. Normand Morison of Hartford surgeon-in-chief.

The colony sloop Defence, built at Middletown three years before, was put in order, and placed under command of John Prentiss of New London. Transports were hired; soldiers enlisted under offer of eight pounds in old tenor bills a month, with certain increased allowances when they furnished their own guns, cartridge boxes and blankets; and promise of "equal share in all the plunder with the souldiers of the neighboring governments."

The Massachusetts contingent got away from Nantasket for the port of Canso, where the whole expedition were to rendezvous, on the 27th of March. Connecticut's followed from New London Sunday, April 14. Good Governor Wolcott wrote a hurried letter back to his wife, dated the 10th, in which he says: "Dear heart, excuse my hurry which

which has engrossed my whole time since here, and engrosses every day. But my heart is the same toward you as before, and hope to have a time to pour it out into your bosom, recounting the Toils and dangers I have born, or meet you in endless happiness when our conversation will be upon a better subject and more pleasing. Farewell, sweet heart. Give my love to my family and friends."

On their way to their rendezvous at Canso the commanders of the flotilla had leisure to study their instructions for the campaign, carefully drawn up by Lawyer Shirley. It is safe to say a more extraordinary document was never compiled for the directory of a military enterprise. Too long by far to quote, its general quality is well enough indicated in a letter written by Shirley to Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire, a few sentences of which it may be worth while to recall: "The success of our enterprise," Shirley says, "will entirely depend on the execution the first night after the arrival of our forces. For this purpose it is necessary that the whole fleet should make Chapeau Rouge Point just at the shutting in of day, when they cannot easily be discovered . . . so as to have all the men landed before midnight; the landing of whom it is computed by Captain Durell

Durell and Mr. Bastide will take up three hours at least. After which the forming of the four several corps to be employed in the scaling the walls of Louisbourg, near the east gate fronting the sea, and the west gate fronting the harbor, to cover the retreat of the two before-mentioned parties in case of a repulse, and to attack the Grand Battery (which attack must be made at the same time with the two other attacks) will take two hours more at least. After these four bodies are formed, their march to their respective posts from which they are to make their attacks will take up another two hours, which, supposing the transports to arrive at Chapeau Rouge Bay at nine o'clock in the evening and not before (as it will be necessary for them to do in order to land and march under cover of the night) will bring them to four o'clock in the morning, being daybreak, before they begin their attack, which will be full late for them to begin."

That is to say, nearly a hundred vessels, of all sailing capacities and sizes, are to arrive simultaneously at nine o'clock in the evening, at a specified point in a bay into which probably not one of them ever sailed before, disembark their troops, who are to march from two to four miles through bogs and over rocks, in the darkness, cross a fortress ditch of two to ten rods in width, scale the walls in two places

places, as well as the walls of the Grand Battery two miles away, and do it in four hours from landing, and seven hours from casting anchor at precisely nine o'clock. It must have been a relief to Pepperell and Wolcott to find at the end of the long minute documents a postscript in these words: "Notwithstanding these instructions you have received from me, I must leave you to act, upon unforeseen emergencies, according to your best discretion."

The "unforeseen emergencies" developed right away. The New Hampshire flotilla arrived at the rendezvous at Canso, April 1. The Massachusetts vessels dropped in along from the 5th to the 10th, and Connecticut got there by the 25th. But Chapeau Rouge Bay was frozen solid. Massachusetts men had been fretting a fortnight over the ice and Connecticut's tardiness. But the delay had been a great blessing.

Commander Peter Warren, who from his station in the West Indies had sent his refusal to Governor Shirley to take part in the Louisbourg expedition on the ground that it was a mere provincial enterprise, unauthorized by the Home Government, had, two days after that refusal, received dispatches ordering his fleet to Boston, for general co-operation with Governor Shirley, in any service which might

might seem important. Arriving off Boston he learned from a pilot of the sailing of the provincial flotilla, and without pausing for conference with Shirley set sail after them. By the 23d of April he was off Canso with four frigates of from forty to sixty guns each, an unexpected and wholly amazing reinforcement! The ice broke up in Chapeau Rouge Bay on April 27th. The fleet sailed the 29th, intending to reach the directed landing-place at nine in the evening. But another "unexpected emergency" developed. The wind fell to a calm, and in the morning the whole armament, with the big frigates in the offing, was full in view from the ramparts of Louisbourg. Shirley's fine scheme for taking Louisbourg by surprise had clean gone overboard. Fortunately the "discretion," to which the governor in the case of "unexpected emergencies" commended the provincial commanders, remained still with them on deck.

Left to their own resources the men got ashore, as I have said, a hundred and fifty years ago this afternoon, and they went straight at their daring and indeed almost foolhardy enterprise.

Into the details of the forty-nine days struggle which followed I have no time to enter. I cannot pause to describe how the very next morning after landing a detachment of men under Vaughn, the Damariscotta

Damariscotta pioneer, set fire to an extensive range of storehouses, filled with important supplies, naval and military, out beyond the Grand Battery, or how under the excitement and alarm of the smoke and fire from this combustion, the garrison of the Grand Battery itself most unaccountably and most disastrously evacuated that indispensably important part of the defences, and left its thirty heavy cannon to be turned by the provincials against the town. I cannot narrate the story of the dragging of the cannon from the vessels by men often up to their knees or thighs in mud, across bogs and hillocks, first to Green Hill, a mile from the King's Bastion at Louisbourg; then, successively, by toilsome stages to a second, third, fourth, and finally to a fifth point of vantage, all the while under fire from the fortress and all the while keeping up an answering fire from their own guns. I cannot tell how, over on Light-House point, the gallant provincials erected a battery, digging ten heavy cannon out of the sand where the Frenchmen had concealed them, to make it of and turning its destructive fire against the formidable Island Fort which held the entrance to the harbor. I have no time to enlarge on the disappointment of the beleagured garrison when they learned that Warren's fleet outside had captured on the 19th of May

of May the French ship of war Vigilant of sixty-four guns, which was approaching for their relief, and which now only afforded, as the Grand Battery fortress and the Light-House point guns had done, a new agency of assault against them. I cannot tell what heroic, though futile, efforts were made on the 26th of May to capture the Island Fort under cover of night, in doing which the provincial forces lost more men than in all the rest of the siege; nor can I allude to the occasional glimpses we got of the employment or divertisements of the men in off hours of duty; how they caught trout and lobsters; how they raced, wrestled and pitched quoits; or how some of them wandering too far from the camp, lost a scalp or two at the hands of the Indians lurking in the camp rear. I cannot tell how Captain Moody exhorted; how Roger Wolcott (doubtless for lack of Warner's Safe Kidney Cure) was doubled up with "nephritic pains," or how the enemy within the town had their share of sufferings also from houses riddled with shots, from discordant counsels, and from prevalent sickness.

I can only say that on the 15th of June, in immediate prospect of a combined assault by sea as well as land (the crippled condition of the Island Fort now for the first time permitting the attempt of the

of the fleet to enter the harbor), a flag of truce with proposals for surrender came from Duchambon, the Louisbourg commander, to the tattered and wearied but tenacious provincials. The next day was consumed with negotiating the terms. But on the 17th the English fleet sailed quietly into the harbor, and the keys of the city and the fortress were presented to Pepperell by the French general. Louisbourg was captured. The joyful army held a banquet to celebrate the victory. Chaplain Moody was to say grace. Remembering his Sunday prayers, the officers felt a little nervous as to the length of time they should be detained from their repast. The chaplain surprised and gratified them by praying : " Good Lord, we have so much to thank Thee for that time will be too short and we must leave it to eternity. Bless our food and fellowship on this joyful occasion, for the sake of Christ our Lord, Amen." Governor Wolcott could not attend the dinner for still continued lack of Warner's Kidney Cure.

The news of Louisbourg's surrender reached Boston at one o'clock on the morning of the 3d of July. It reached Hartford on the 5th. Everywhere it was received with tumults of rejoicing. Guns were fired, bells rung, congratulations exchanged.

And

And well they might be. An expedition which, by all laws of probable reasoning, was doomed from the outset to certain defeat, had by the good "discretion" of the commanders in the "unforeseen emergencies" which arose, and (it must not be forgotten, for those commanders most distinctly recognized it), by a series of incalculable and astonishing conspiring circumstances in their behalf, which no wit of man could have anticipated, much less provided for, been turned into a triumphant success. The scheme for the reduction of the American Gibraltar drawn by a lawyer, to be executed by a merchant, at the head of a force of farmers and mechanics, was nevertheless in result a triumph. What the cool and careful Parkman calls a "mad scheme" proved in the issue one of the most splendid achievements of the century. Well may any of us who are fortunate enough to have had ancestors in that memorable event feel proud of being among the sons of the captors of Louisbourg.